

Child Welfare Services Review Working Group Recommendations

BACKGROUND

On August 10, 2018, a time-limited working group known as the Child Welfare Services Review Working Group (Working Group) was established to complete an assessment and report on the state of the County of San Diego child welfare system. The group looked at the needs for system improvement, quality assurance, personnel training, and policy barriers, as well as outcome data to ensure the health and safety of dependent youth in foster care. On December 11, 2018 (12), the Working Group provided its final report to the San Diego County Board of Supervisors (Board) with 88 recommendations for consideration by the Board. The table below identifies all 88 recommendations, completed in March 2022.

| Number | Recommendation |
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| 1 | Identify leaders with the skill to direct, model, and inspire others as champions for excellence.* |
| 2 | Create an implementation team to expand and evaluate Safety Enhanced Together (SET) efforts. The implementation team should be inclusive of community stakeholders and focused on the achievement of intended outcomes. |
| 3 | Actively involve stakeholders in establishing forward looking core values, adding to the foundation established by SET, to provide consistent decision points for leadership and staff for strategy, prioritization, execution, and personnel practices.* |
| 4 | Create public recognition for staff at all levels whose work personifies these values.* |
| 5 | Identify leaders with a clear willingness to examine their organization with honesty and transparency.* |
| 6 | Actively involve children, youth, and families and providers to create plans and implement policies that change experiences and result in greater positive impact.* |
| 7 | Enhance education and training to create better experiences of Child Welfare Services (CWS) improving the lives of children and families that can influence the public's consciousness.* |
| 8 | Change the chair of the Child Abuse Prevention Coordinating Council (CAPCC) from CWS management to a community representative, ideally an executive level representative of a community partner with the experience and expertise to set an agenda that includes community concerns and can provide more transparency to the community. |
| 9 | Establish a standing CAPCC subcommittee of concerned and knowledgeable community partners who can understand and effectively promote implementation of the recommendations in this report and monitor their progress. |

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| 10 | Authorize the new CAPCC standing subcommittee permission to investigate and report to the CAPCC chair on issues raised by community partners, children and families, or the general public that pertain to the implementation of recommendations in this report. |
| 11 | Require the CAPCC to monitor and issue a periodic report to the Chief Administrative Officer (CAO) and Board of Supervisors, in cooperation with CWS, on the current state of CWS that includes the implementation of "...improvements in services to families and victims who are in public charge" per CAPCC responsibility number five.* |
| 12 | Realign current reporting relationships of CWS operations in each region from the Director to the Director of CWS. |
| 13 | Establish the position of Chief of Social Work, reporting to the Director of CWS, who is focused on the transparent and unified delivery of social work practice across all Health and Human Services Agency regions. |
| 14 | Centralize all placement units. The authority to place a child should rest with a worker focused on the wishes and needs of the child(ren) and family. Factors that should be considered include: siblings who also need placement, proximity of parents, location of school of origin and whether rights to school of origin has been waived by the education rights holder and minor, foreseeability of relative clearing placement in the immediate future, and/or mental health needs of the child. |
| 15 | Review the organizational placement of the Ombudsman office to determine if it should reside inside or outside CWS. |
| 16 | Require the Ombudsman office to regularly provide a summary report to the CAPCC regarding the number, type, final resolution, and/or current status of complaints.* |
| 17 | Prior to the retirement of the current Director, select a leader who inspires confidence, has the ability to engage and communicate with all stakeholders while implementing the significant organizational change required. |
| 18 | Conduct an organizational authority, position, and compensation review of all CWS leadership positions to ensure parity among positions based on required skills and experience and to attract the best talent available.* |
| 19 | Determine as quickly as possible, the potential fiscal impact of the Title IV-E project ending. |
| 20 | Share the fiscal impact and resulting operational plan with all stakeholders. |
| 21 | Make all CWS policies publicly available. |
| 22 | Review and update all vendor contracts to ensure alignment with the requirements of the Continuum of Care Reform/Resource Family Approval. |

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| 23 | Implement a long-term Secondary Traumatic Stress (STS)-specific intervention for supervisors and caseworkers. Evidence-supported models to explore include Components for Enhancing Clinician Experience and Reducing Trauma (CE-CERT) and the Resilience Alliance: Promoting Resilience and Reducing Secondary Trauma Among CWS Staff. |
| 24 | Explore Safety Culture initiatives undertaken in Tennessee and other child welfare jurisdictions. Preliminary studies on the integration of Safety Culture have demonstrated lower levels of employee emotional exhaustion. |
| 25 | Enhance reflective supervision and ensure it is conducted in a private setting with greater emphasis on addressing case-related issues and worker needs as opposed to tasks. |
| 26 | Provide access to licensed therapists throughout the regions who can provide ongoing support to workers and supervisors.* |
| 27 | Evaluate Employee Assistance Programs (EAP) and providers who specialize in treating STS. |
| 28 | Enhance manager-level training on STS, conflict resolution, and stress management.* |
| 29 | Consult with outside experts, such as the National Council on Crime and Delinquency (NCCD), National Child Welfare Workforce Institute (NCWWI), and Kempe Center, to conduct a workload analysis and determine best practices to achieve optimal caseloads and staffing levels. |
| 30 | Explore state and national best practices pertaining to policy changes such as the number and quality of social worker visits with families; determine if procedural changes could improve safety and reduce risk for children in open CWS voluntary and dependency cases. |
| 31 | Follow the Structured Decision Making (SDM) contact guidelines to increase monthly visits for families at higher levels of risk. |
| 32 | Assess the quality of face-to-face contacts and home visits using the best practices established and resources created by the Capacity Building Center for States' Quality Matters: Improving Caseworker Contacts with Children, Youth, and Families initiative.* |
| 33 | Strengthen CWS policies to ensure face-to-face contacts with children, youth, and families reflect best practices. |
| 34 | Conduct a thorough analysis that includes a review of Protective Services Worker (PSW) and supervisor competencies that correlate with trauma-informed practices. First, review of the most updated findings of neurobiology and neurodevelopment and the impacts of trauma could be done. Then, an analysis of whether those have been integrated into training, supervision and coaching would be the next step. |

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| | Finally, they could explore whether some practice improvements and supports can be directed to focus on improving placement stability. |
| 35 | Evaluate the operationalization of the SET practice framework across agency culture, practices, and policies.* |
| 36 | Conduct a review of available trauma-focused resources and services in the community to determine areas of need and improvement. |
| 37 | Engage in cross-training and shared learning opportunities with system partners and providers to increase trauma awareness and improve collaboration.* |
| 38 | Create consistency of new hire caseloads throughout regions and ensure caseloads are increasingly complex, commensurate with the knowledge, skills, and abilities of the individual worker. |
| 39 | Establish designated training units in each region comprised of a supervisor and a senior-level worker to coordinate learning opportunities (e.g., coaching, simulation training, field exercises, shadowing, etc.). |
| 40 | Establish a designated training facility to improve ease of access to in-person training and continuing education opportunities.* |
| 41 | Increase the amount of field experience for new hires through observation and shadowing of senior-level workers. |
| 42 | Require senior staff (e.g., supervisors and managers) to attend annual advanced simulation training aimed at improving quality and reflective supervision skills. This training should be followed by field training and/or coaching to increase transfer of learning.* |
| 43 | Establish stronger guidelines for continuing education that address individual areas of need and improvement for caseworkers and supervisors. |
| 44 | Increase caseworker training on assessing for safety across all regions and units. |
| 45 | Explore peer support and mentorship models to create internal support systems and enhance caseworker and supervisor skills and abilities. |
| 46 | Immediately take steps to ensure that children are readily able to attend in their own court hearings.* |
| 47 | Create a special Emergency Response Unit to investigate reports of maltreatment while in care. This unit would be independent of regional case carrying social workers, have specialized training in interviewing children, and conduct independent investigations of hotline referrals when those referrals pertain to dependent children. |
| 48 | CWS to conduct quarterly audits of ‘unfounded’ findings to ensure that sufficient investigations are being conducted and to identify any training needs of this unit’s workers.* |

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| 49 | CWS to develop a protocol that adheres to California Rule of Court, Rule 5.534(c) in both letter and spirit: Ensure that the form is provided in a timely manner with appropriate instructions. |
| 50 | Attach the most recent Foster Family Agency (FFA) report to the court report if a child is placed in a home within a FFA. (Welfare and Institutions Code (WIC) 366.21(d))* |
| 51 | CWS to add practice steps regarding providing notice to parties/counsel of placement changes in the CWS training curriculum so that social workers are aware of the required procedures. |
| 52 | CWS to monitor social worker regional compliance with the notice provisions as required by the WIC, including but not limited to WIC 16010.6 and 16010.7. |
| 53 | CWS to monitor compliance with its own CWS Change of Placement policies.* |
| 54 | Make targeted efforts to recruit foster families that can accommodate sibling sets.* |
| 55 | Attempt to keep homes that can accept multiple children free until they can be filled by sibling sets, rather than placing multiple individual children in those homes.* |
| 56 | Keep sibling sets at Polinsky Children's Center (PCC) longer than 10 days, if necessary, in order to facilitate sibling sets being placed together.* |
| 57 | Do not break up a sibling set simply because a placement becomes available for one sibling before a placement can be found that can accommodate the entire set.* |
| 58 | Submit a written report, if necessary, to the California Department of Social Services explaining the reasons for the overstay, as provided for in WIC Section 11462.022(f)(1).* |
| 59 | Continue efforts to place siblings who have been placed in different locations together in a location that can take them all and report to the court monthly via Ex Parte reports: 1) what continued efforts have been made to place the siblings together and 2) what visitation between siblings has been facilitated.* |
| 60 | Ask Child Welfare policy experts to review the Policy Manual and include directives to case-carrying social workers of the requirements of WIC 16002 and WIC 306.5 as needed in policies related to placement and visitation. |
| 61 | Make a referral to the Promises 2 Kids Camp Connect program to ensure quality visitation for the children if there is no option other than to split up a sibling set.* |
| 62 | Standardize the use of the Foster Youth Services Coordinating Program's Best Interest in School of Origin Decisions: A Checklist for Decision Making throughout CWS in CFT meetings to ensure there is a consistent, meaningful |

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| | analysis and focus on school stability, school of origin, and school success for every student in foster care. |
| 63 | Include the checklist analysis in the Child and Family Team (CFT) report that is provided to the court, parties, and counsel.* |
| 64 | Ensure that there is a specific, written expectation in all relevant CWS policies that foster students receive the benefit of the statutory legal preference that they remain in their school of origin, with transportation provided. |
| 65 | Train educational rights holders regarding the rights that children must stay in their school of origin and how critical school stability is to successful educational outcomes.* |
| 66 | Collaborate with PCC medical staff and the Juvenile Court to develop an updated joint protocol to obtain parent consent or Juvenile Court order to timely examine and treat children entered and detained at PCC. |
| 67 | Develop a computer interface with the Juvenile Court to allow judicial officers to electronically review and approve protective custody warrants and investigative warrants. |
| 68 | Consult with other County investigative agencies that currently have an electronic interface with the court for judicial review and approval of warrants. |
| 69 | Require that CWS use a committee approach to determine which families would benefit from voluntary services. Currently, the decision is made between line worker, the Supervisor, and the family. A committee consisting of the presenting Social Worker, Social Work Supervisor, Manager, Continuous Quality Improvement (CQI), embedded County Counsel, education liaison from the County Office of Education, Pathways representative, Behavioral Health Services representative, any other available supervisors, interns, and Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children (CSEC) liaison or probation officer, as appropriate, should be convened to determine, as a group, whether the family in question would benefit from Voluntary Services or a more formal, court-supervised, structure. The committee should reconvene during the life of the voluntary agreement as significant developments occur (e.g. new referrals on the subject family) to continue to assess the appropriateness of voluntary services for the family in question.* |
| 70 | CWS to track (via The Child and Adolescent Needs and Strengths [CANS] assessment tool) and assess the overall impact to children's well-being by examining initial scores in relation to follow-up scores of the children over time.* |
| 71 | Create a new Voluntary Services Unit within CWS so that assigned social workers can dedicate themselves to adequately servicing voluntary families. |

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| 72 | Ensure that every family contracting with CWS be informed of their rights so that any family entering into a Voluntary Services agreement does so knowingly and intelligently.* |
| 73 | Develop a formal CWS protocol that ensures families are not coerced when they are offered voluntary services. |
| 74 | The County should also explore the provision of court-appointed legal services to children as well as parents who are being diverted to the Probate Court. |
| 75 | Adopt the Proposed Voluntary Services Agreement Protocol put forward by the CWS Working Group. |
| 76 | Establish from first contact and throughout the RFA process, the expectation that caregivers are expected to care for the children placed in their homes until permanency for the children has been determined.* |
| 77 | Develop a responsive system of training for resource families that identifies, prepares, and delivers ongoing trauma-informed training at the time needed in relation to the development of the children in their care.* |
| 78 | Obtain approval for additional funding to increase staff. |
| 79 | Determine a process for the sharing of an RFA applicant's progress towards approval with all stakeholders to include CWS departments, Minor's/Parent's Counsel, the FFA who has placement of the child, and the Juvenile Court.* |
| 80 | Investigate/develop the ability to use community partners to complete, or transfer a resource family applicant to, for approval. |
| 81 | Investigate the use of a psychological evaluation tool to improve the speed and quality of the written family evaluation. |
| 82 | Develop a process to determine which relative family member to select for the RFA approval process when multiple relatives have been identified and express interest in caring for the child(ren). |
| 83 | Establish a CWS unit focused on providing same day/after hours (24/7) responsive support to caregivers. |
| 84 | Continue to conduct an annual caregiver satisfaction survey, sharing results with stakeholders.* |
| 85 | Develop a comprehensive and unified approach for the recruitment of resource families in partnership with Probation, the philanthropic community, and FFAs. To include data and demographic analysis to conduct targeted campaigns specific to geographic location, skill, and experience.* |
| 86 | Leverage the internet and social media channels to connect, inform, and recruit potential resource families.* |

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| 87 | Consolidate the three different web pages currently used by the County for resource family information sharing and recruitment. |
| 88 | The County must immediately leverage both internal and external technology resources to adopt/develop an RFA Applicant Management System. |